

WASHINGTON, DC-Today, Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) held a press conference at the U.S. Capitol to introduce legislation making it illegal to use polar bears in traveling shows and circuses. Also in attendance at the press conference were Resident Commissioner Aníbal Acevedo-Vilá (D-PR), Ron Kagan, Executive Director of the Detroit Zoo and Wayne Pacelle, Senior VP for the Humane Society of the U.S. The legislation is necessary to ensure that circuses such as the Suarez Bros. Circus, which currently operates in Puerto Rico, cannot abuse polar bears and keep them captive in conditions that do not meet the basic requirements of animal cruelty laws.

“Polar bears are beautiful, dignified animals that belong in their natural arctic environment or in accredited zoos that can guarantee cool containment areas and access to water. The bottom line is that the circus is just not an appropriate place for a polar bear. We have the power to stop this outrage, end the cruelty and prohibit future mistreatment of these amazing animals,” said Congressman Blumenauer.

Blumenauer's legislation, titled the “Polar Bear Protection Act,” would fine or imprison anyone found to be in violation of the law and defines a “traveling show or circus” as any show or circus that spends most of its working time each year away from its permanent facility.

The Mexico-based traveling Suarez Bros. Circus, which is the current target of this legislation, obtained a permit from the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) this summer to import seven polar bears into Puerto Rico to use as its prime attraction. Because the animals were exposed to high temperatures and denied water to cool themselves, the Puerto Rico Dept. of Natural Resources filed animal cruelty charges against the circus. Over 70 members of the U.S. House and Senate signed letters stating that they support immediate action regarding these bears, including confiscating them to improve their quality of life. Several zoos in the United States have offered to house the bears. In March, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service confiscated one of the bears, which is now housed in the Baltimore zoo.